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Digital classrooms, public profiles

by

Sara C. Doan

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Charles Kostelnick, Major Professor
Barbara Blakely
Jean Goodwin
Stacy Tye-Williams

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2015

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Course Management Systems at Iowa State University	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Theoretical Framework	5
Importance of the Study.....	6
Scope of the Study	6
Summary of Findings.....	7
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Digital Representation	9
Course Management Systems	15
Instructor Perception of Student Profiles.....	15
Conclusion	21
CHAPTER 3 METHODS	25
Background	25
Participant Selection	28
Survey Methodology.....	29
Interview Methodology.....	30
Coding	31
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS	32
Virtual Spaces and Tools	32
Boundaries and Bridges: Physical and Online Classrooms	40
Creating Identity: Online Impression Formation.....	49
Social Media versus Course Management Systems.....	57
Limitations of the Study.....	64

CHAPTER 5	CONCLUSIONS.....	66
	Recommendations.....	66
	Conclusion	67
REFERENCES		69
APPENDIX A: SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....		72

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Default Moodle Profile Picture	3
Figure 2 Instructor's Public Profile	27
Figure 3 How Many Semesters Have Instructors Taught English 150 and/or 250 at Iowa State University?.....	32
Figure 4 Survey Respondents' Job Titles.....	33
Figure 5 Have You Customized Your CMS Profile?.....	35
Figure 6 Did You Ask Your Students to Customize Their Profiles as an Activity (Required or Optional)?.....	37
Figure 7 Have You Looked at Your Students' CMS Profiles?.....	39
Figure 8 Moodle's Grading Interface as Panopticon.....	52
Figure 9 Did Seeing Your Students' Profiles Affect Your Memory of Those Students?	53
Figure 10 Instructors' Ages	58
Figure 11 Instructors with or without Social Media Accounts	59

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ABSTRACT

Framed by the larger questions of digital representation and course management systems, I examine how instructors perceive customized student profile on course management systems. For this exploratory study, I have surveyed 41 instructors and interviewed 9 instructors of English 150 and 250 in the English Department to examine how these instructors use both CMS and student profiles inside and outside of the classroom at Iowa State University.

This study has found that instructors use their course management systems in various online ways: as online syllabi, as workshops for their students, as homework hubs, and as an extension of the classroom. Five main themes from this study include course management systems as a space, course management systems as a resource, boundaries between the physical and online classrooms, online identities through user profiles, and course management systems versus social media.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

User profiles have fascinated researchers since the rise of the internet, promoting research in self-representation and how members of groups use each other's online profiles (Tidwell and Walther, 2002; Raad et al., 2013). Consequently, researchers have studied the interplay of picture and text that represents users on Facebook, other social media, and any websites that allow users to represent themselves digitally (Van Der Heide, D'Angelo, and Schumaker, 2012). How does this fascination with online representation with user profiles carry into the hands-on, pedagogical world of online course management systems?

Course management systems are websites, usually sponsored by a university or other educational institution, which allow instructors and students to interact with course content and one another. Each user, whether student or instructor, has a personal profile on the source management system where they can add a profile picture and write about their goals and interests, much like a profile found on social media such as Facebook. Many instructors use course management systems to assign homework, post course policies, and to view and grade student work. When instructors interact with students on course management systems (e.g. grading student papers, reading forum posts, etc.), those student profiles, which sometimes include thumbnails of students' profile pictures, are linked to the students' work. While researchers have examined students' perceptions of digital representation on course management websites (Kear et al., 2014), instructors' perspectives have not been examined.

Framed by the larger questions of digital representation and course management systems, I will examine how instructors perceive student profile pictures on course management systems. Using grounded theory, I have surveyed and interviewed ISUComm instructors to examine how

these instructors use both CMS and student profiles inside and outside of the classroom at Iowa State University.

Course Management Systems at Iowa State University

The vast majority of instructors in the Iowa State University English Department use a course management system to interact with their students online. Popular course management systems include Moodle, Blackboard, and variations of WordPress. These CMS have many features like forums, hyperlinks, quizzes, and—the focus of this study—user profiles. Although English 150/250 students here at Iowa State University have the option to customize their Moodle profiles by adding a picture and/or a short piece of text about themselves, the majority of students do not complete this task. While instructors and students use Moodle and other course management systems to varying degrees, these interactions are still regulated by the Moodle interface, which includes thumbnails of profile pictures and links to personal profiles.

In Spring 2014, I studied data visualization with Charles Kostelnick; my seminar paper discussed the role of visuals in online grading with Moodle and then redesigned the Moodle interface to increase the visual ease with which instructors could view classroom data. I noticed that thumbnails of students' profile pictures, customized or not, appear on the assignment grading pages in Moodle. To customize their profiles, students may add their own pictures; if students resist this customization, the default thumbnail of an isotypical human figure, which could easily be identified as male, appears instead (see Figure 1). The current situation of student profile customization at Iowa State begs for further study because these profiles, whether customized or non-customized can greatly affect digital interaction between students and instructors.



Figure 1: Default Moodle Profile

Picture. *This isotypical, male profile picture automatically appears as students' profiles pictures until students replace it with a customized profile picture.*

In my own teaching, I have noticed that I remember students who customize their profiles through the addition of a picture to their Moodle profile better than the students who do not. For this study, I will examine how other instructors use course management systems and students' customized profiles and how these profiles affect instructors' perceptions of their students.

Statement of the Problem

Although researchers have studied digital representation (Van Der Heide et al., 2012), and how students use course management systems like Moodle and Blackboard or even Facebook (C. Romero et al., 2008; Bhat and Herman, 2013; Souleles, 2012; Chou et al., 2010), researchers have not studied how instructors perceive students' profiles and profile pictures. Until now, the questions of how these perceptions affect classroom atmosphere, the grading process, and interpersonal interactions both online and face-to-face and their pedagogical impact have not been explored. How instructors perceive students who customize their course management profiles has major implications for hybrid and online classroom interaction, such as student customization helping instructors to learn students' names, student customization helping instructors to get to know students on a more personal level, and how student customization impacts student/instructor online interaction. Finding answers to these questions, and many others about instructor perceptions of student course management profile customization, is the purpose of my study.

Purpose of the Study

My study will explore and research instructor perceptions of student profile customization, helping to fill this dearth of research in studying how instructors use CMS. Through this study, I will also extend the research of both digital representation and of course management systems by examining how instructors use and perceive their students' CMS profiles. By researching instructor perspectives of student self-representation, my study will have implications for composition pedagogy, providing insight as to how Iowa State University instructors of English 150 and 250 use course management systems and for best practices of visual rhetoric and identity formation in academic profiles. My study will explore how instructors use and perceive students' customized or non-customized course management profiles.

Instructors' perspectives on students' course management profiles could have further implications for the online grading process, as students' profiles are linked to CMS grading interfaces. For hybrid or online classes, student-instructor interactions are conducted almost exclusively through course management systems; student profile customizations and instructor perceptions may carry great weight in these situations where face-to-face interaction may not or cannot occur. Because such a small amount of research about CMS profiles and because none of this existing research includes instructors' perspectives, this study will focus on exploring how instructors actually use students' CMS profiles. To this end, my study explores the following questions:

- How do English 150 and 250 instructors at Iowa State University use course management systems in their teaching?

- How do English 150 and 250 instructors at Iowa State University use their students customized or non-customized course management system profiles?

Theoretical Framework

Since the rise of the internet in the late 1980's and 1990's, questions about the digital representation of internet users have fascinated researchers. On websites like Facebook, users can select pictures of themselves (or even pictures *not* of themselves) to act as the user's avatar, or profile picture. This profile picture appears next to the person's name any time that person appears on others' Facebook newsfeeds; consequently, researchers have been fascinated by the interplay of picture and text that represent users on Facebook, other social media, and any websites that allow users to represent themselves digitally (Van Der Heide, D'Angelo, and Schumaker, 2012) and to replicate real-world interactions and contexts through user profiles (Raad et al., 2013). More important than the "social aspect" of this new medium, digital representation research has also extended into course management systems.

In course management research, digital representation touches on user profiles for students and instructors. Most existing research focuses on Facebook's potential as a pedagogical tool (Souleles, 2012) or briefly mentions content management profiles and mentions course management systems as an area for further research (Chou et al., 2010; Cifuentes et al., 2011). One study, which specifically examines course management system profiles, is Kear et al.'s 2014 article "Social Presence in Online Learning Communities: the role of personal profiles." Researchers compared a survey they conducted on students in 2006 with their second administration of the same survey in 2011/12. In the study, they asked both sets of students about how students interacted with course management profiles and found that students were more familiar with the idea of an online customized profile but still wary of customization for reasons

of privacy (Kear et al., 2014). My study will extend Kear et al.'s research into a previously unexplored realm: studying instructors' perspectives on student customization of course management profiles.

Importance of the Study

Although digital representation and course management systems have both individually been researched, they have not extended into instructors' perceptions of students' profile customization. This uniquely positions my study in an unexplored niche within these two fields of knowledge. While students' perceptions of other students and students' perceptions of instructors have both been studied, the instructors' perceptions of student profile customization opens a new and exciting window into pedagogical theory, visual rhetoric, and best practices for social presence on course management websites.

Scope of the Study

To extend unexplored areas of digital representation and CMS research, this study's scope has stayed mostly exploratory. Forty-one instructors of English 150 and 250 completed the survey portion and nine of those instructors were interviewed. All of these instructors at Iowa State University had taught English 150 and/or 250 within the past year and used a course management system. The survey asked them to answer questions about the ways in which they used their CMS in the classroom, their perspectives on student customization of course management profiles, and whether their perceptions of students had changed after viewing students' customized profiles. Instructors also answered questions about which course management system they used, how many of their students have customized a profile, whether the instructors themselves have customized their profiles, and whether instructors notice student customization.

Summary of Findings

This study found that while all instructors surveyed used CMS in their teaching, the instructors' attitudes, proficiency, and interactions with student profiles varied. Instructors primarily conceptualized CMS in one of two ways: as a space, such as describing their CMS in terms of where to find content, or as a tool, describing their CMS in terms of functionality and use. While many instructors did respond positively about giving students electronic feedback versus paper feedback, many instructors did not use their CMS for much more than an online syllabus or gradebook. The instructors who wrote about their CMS as a space that extended and bridged the face-to-face classroom responded to students' customized profiles much more enthusiastically than instructors who conceptualized their CMS as a tool. Instructors who resisted student customization often berated their students for treating the CMS like a social media profile, an interesting tension because all but two instructors surveyed also had a personal social media account. Overall, the instructors who encouraged student CMS profile customization seemed more engaged with their teaching and with their students.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital representation already surrounds us through social media websites and continues to develop in new and exciting ways. While today's Millennial students have never known a world where social media did not exist, this is not true for all instructors (M. Romero et al., 2013). One place where digital representation has not developed as rapidly or taken hold as ubiquitously is in course management systems (CMS), especially in post-secondary educational settings where the vast majority of instructors use course management systems both in online and face-to-face classrooms (Dahlstrom, Brooks, & Bichsel, 2014).

While course management systems are central to how many instructors and students communicate and interact with one another, course management systems are an under-researched area of pedagogy (Peng, Chou, & Chang, 2008). The little research on CMS has examined how students customize and use personal profiles on course management systems and shows that students struggle with some aspects of customization, sometimes even resisting it outright (Chou, Peng, & Chang, 2010; Kear, Chetwynd, & Jefferis, 2014). Although some research exists on how students view and customize course management system profiles, no current research shows how instructors use students' course management profiles and the effect this profile customization (or lack thereof) affects learning dynamics in the classroom and instructors' perceptions of student profile customization.

In this literature review, I will examine digital representation, course management systems, and instructor perceptions. In digital representation, I will discuss the current research on digital representations, profiles as rhetorical networks, and real-world contexts of profiles in "impression formation" (Van Der Heide, D'Angelo, & Schumaker, 2012, p. 99). For course

management systems, I will develop the contrasting ideas about how students view, customize, or resist profile customization, whether course management profile affect student learning, and how students use instructors' course management system profiles. Finally, I will examine my research questions about how instructors perceive student customization (or lack thereof) in course management systems.

Digital Representation

Since the rise of the internet in the late 1980's and 1990's, researchers have been fascinated by questions about the digital representation and the rhetorical effects of user profiles and profile pictures. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media websites allow users to select a picture of themselves (or picture *not* of themselves) that then act as the user's avatar, or profile picture. Online video games like World of Warcraft allow users to customize their character, or in-game avatar, which is visible to other players in the game. This profile picture or visual avatar appears next to the person's name any time that person's activity appears on others' Facebooks—for example when the user posts or shares content.

One of the biggest changes in digital representation occurred around 2004 when the internet shifted from web 1.0 to web 2.0 (Cifuentes, Xochihua, & Edwards, 2011). While web 1.0 featured content shown on a website, this content was static, hard to edit, and difficult to interact with unless the user was the website administrator, locking users in a one-sided communication model. The shift to web 2.0 enabled users to interact with content like text and pictures on a website. As web 2.0 activities, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow for “dynamic, 2-way communication” between students and instructors (Cifuentes et al., 2011, p. 2). The interactivity in web 2.0 sites allows users to create their own personal profiles

and interact with other users on social media platforms, thus creating new and exciting areas of digital representation for researchers to study.

The rise of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media has led to the rise of the digital profile in digital representation research. The typical profile “is a self-description created by a participant, which typically includes a photo or image to represent them” (Kear, Chetwynd, & Jefferis, 2014, p. 2). When users create a Facebook account, customizing their profile is the first activity they complete through the social media interface. Users add an image as their profile picture, which serves as that user’s avatar in all of their interactions with other users on the site. While user profiles, like the users they represent, are individual and interact with one another on the micro-level, profiles also act as a rhetorical network between users, creating a rhetorical context for user interaction.

Profiles Acting in a Rhetorical Context

By definition, profiles are pieces of digital communication and representation through which users can interact with one another within a network. To extend this idea, user profiles work within Peng, Chou, & Chang’s (2008) definition of interaction: “In classical communication theories and learning theories, interaction is a state between a sender and a receiver, and between them lie messages that can usually be categorized into source and feedback. A good interaction may be reached by continuous modifications of source messages and feedback messages” (p. 62). In other words, interactive user profiles exist in a network between the owner of a particular profile and a viewer. Both the owner and viewer can moderate content on the profile, but a marked difference exists between source messages (such as an outward-facing tweet on Twitter) or a feedback message (such as a viewer commenting on another user’s Facebook status). In terms of profiles, good interactions rely on large amounts of

source and feedback messages, like many users posting to a single thread on an online forum. User profiles were designed with interaction in mind; responsibility for whether users take advantage of these networks rests on the users themselves. As Web 2.0 applications, profiles rely on dynamic, not static, user interaction, although these programs still face limitations to what users can control (Alvarado, Romero-Salcedo, & Sheremetov, 2004; Chou, Peng, & Chang, 2010).

Profiles act as an interactive rhetorical network, allowing users to create impressions of one another (Van Der Heide, D'Angelo, & Schumaker, 2012), network with one another through web 2.0 (Cifuentes et al., 2011), and create context-dependent relationships that mimic the relationships users have in the physical world (Raad, Chbeir, & Dipanda, 2013). To network between profiles, users rely on Web 2.0, 2-way communication (Cifuentes et al., 2011) to send messages to one another, whether directly or indirectly, by posting a profile picture, updating textual cues on their profiles, or communicating directly with other users on the site. The messages that users send and receive through their online profiles can provide a context for “impression formation” of a user (Van Der Heide et al., 2012, p. 99).

Impression formation

While impression formation is not a new concept in the fields of communication and psychology, researchers are still moving the idea of impression formation into the digital realm. “Impression formation in the context of social networking web sites raises new questions about how people form focused impressions of a target in the face...of cues about a target’s identity” (Van Der Heide et al., 2012, p. 99). As the popularity of social media profiles continues to grow, research on impression formation through digital profiles will become an even more important area to explore.

Impression formation, central to online interactions, also correlates to the ways in which technology users interact in person. Although some relationships between users take place solely online, many online interactions—especially in academic or professional relationships where societal norms take more prescribed forms than solely social relationships—have roots in real-world contexts. This means that the type of face-to-face relationship users have affects their online interaction synergistically (Raad et al., 2013). Users in both face-to-face and online profile contexts can form impressions of one another, but they use different, context-based strategies to do so (Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

While users can form impressions of people in purely online environments, lack of real-world context can negatively affect user profiles. Profiles often display information about users such as hometown, employment, hobbies, etc. This information strengthens the profile's utility, but does little to situate this user's information within a real-world context (Eyharabide and Amandi, 2011), ignoring the user's motivation behind their likes and dislikes, choice of profile picture, and messages they send to other users. Additionally, profiles missing information, such as a profile picture, basic information, etc., negatively affects user interaction by not including information users might receive from a real-world context (Tidwell and Walther, 2002; Raad et al., 2013). However, Tanis and Postmes (2007) argued that lack of detailed, customized information on user profiles led users to behave more genuinely than they would have in the presence of more over impression-generating cues such as profile pictures and textual autobiographies. Nevertheless, Tanis and Postmes (2007) conceded that profile customization enriches digital interaction between user profiles, even if profile customization can create negative impressions of other users.

Van Der Heide et al. outlined this disconnect between impression formation, real-world context, and motivation as expressed in networks of user profiles:

When someone evaluates another person, they are less likely to base their judgment on normative behavior, because it is not very informative. That is, one cannot tell if the behavior is simply a product of the current context (i.e., the behavior should be situationally attributed) or whether the behavior in question arises because of some unique characteristic of the target (i.e., the behavior should be dispositionally attributed). Instead, observers will base their impression judgments of others on nonnormative behavior—the behavior that is deemed not expected given the context—to better judge an individual's personality. This information is expected to be more valuable, for it represents an individual's personality rather than acts of conformity to a situation. (p. 105)

To deepen the current understanding of digital representation, the disconnect between user profiles, real-world context, and motivation in digital representation must be further explored, especially since existing research debates the effectiveness of profile customization. Walther, Slovacek, and Tidwell (2001) state that profile customization increases positive social presence for short-term interactions, but has negative results for long-term interactions. Other research shows that that user photos and names have a negative effect on participants' satisfaction with the online interactions (Tanis and Postmes, 2007). In any case, researchers have been fascinated by the interplay of picture and text that represents users on Facebook, other social media, and any websites that allow users to represent themselves digitally (Van Der Heide, D'Angelo, and Schumaker, 2012). These websites have become explosively popular, especially among users born after 1982, otherwise known as Millennials.

Because the rise of web 2.0 occurred in the earliest years of the 20th century, the majority of current college students have been immersed in the idea of representing themselves through user profiles. For many Millennials, especially those active on social media websites since their early adolescence, networked profiles are the norm (Aubry, 2013). As the internet is both increasingly visually-oriented and tailored to those in the Millennial generation, researchers were unsurprised to find that Millennials prefer visuals to text (Aubry, 2013; Romero, M. et al., 2013). Millennial's preference for visuals over text connects to the main way they represent themselves through online profiles and how they form impressions of other users: through profile pictures.

Visual rhetorical theory—or the study of pictures, symbols, and design components—enables digital representation researchers to use rhetorical tools and vocabulary for decoding digital representations. Digital representation heavily relies on the visual to represent a person in a digital setting such as a profile. While some research intrinsically separates images and text to consider as separate elements (Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001; Van Der Heide et al., 2012), would analysis of user profiles be stronger if both elements were considered in concert? While Wysocki's words about digitally using visuals and text together come from 2001, from just around the implementation of Web 2.0, they still describe the digital landscape of today:

The kinds of documents we all encounter and are increasingly expected to make have changed and are changing... we do need to have understandings of how the visual elements in our texts work... [we] assume that content is separate from form, writing from the visual, information from design, word from image. (p. 138)

In visual analysis of user profiles, customized or not, we ignore how the text and visuals work together, instead focusing our attention on either visual or textual/verbal cues. This focusing on

either visuals or text when looking at a profile is symptomatic of our lack of progress in integrating the two since Wysocki wrote these words over a decade ago.

Wysocki's analysis contrasts with how Van Der Heide et al. (2012) describe negative impression formation in their study on text and image cues on impression formation on Facebook profiles: "When photographic cues are positive, there is little cause for an observer to question his or her judgments about that person's characteristics. However, when photographic cues are negative, text-based self-disclosures can significantly affect an observer's judgment of a target" (p. 109). While Van Der Heide et al. focus on the visual and textual pieces separately, they do acknowledge the interplay between the media for impression formation in user profiles.

Digital representation through visuals and text on user profiles has also worked into the academic realm through the rise of using Facebook and Twitter in the classroom. Students' reactions to this "under-researched pedagogy tool" vary (Souleles, p. 121, 2012). Students display a mix of interest and dismay as instructors experiment with using social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in the classroom. While some students approve of using a familiar interface that they already check often, students have concerns about interacting with their instructor online because they wish to keep their Facebook profiles—extensions of their personal life—private from their instructors and their academic lives (Souleles, 2012). This rise of social media for academic purposes directly parallels the popularity of course management systems.

Course Management Systems

A course management system (CMS) is a website that students and instructors use to access and interact with online course content, usually accessed via a school or university. As web 2.0 platforms, course management systems allow students and instructors to post and modify interactive content like forum posts, quizzes, journals, and assignments. Each user,

whether student or instructor, has a personal profile on the source management system where they can add a profile picture and write a short autobiography about their goals and interests, much like a Facebook profile. When instructors interact with students on course management systems (e.g., grading, reading forum posts, etc.), those student profiles, including thumbnails of students' profile pictures, are always linked to those students' work, messages, or forum posts.

If CMS and social media interfaces share many of the same traits, why don't more instructors use Facebook and Twitter in the classroom? Some research suggests that CMS should be used in tandem with Facebook or other social media sites in order for students to contact their instructors quickly, get to know the instructors through information on Facebook profiles, and to utilize an interface with which most students are already comfortable, especially in online-only courses (Aubry, 2013; Souleles, 2012). In course management systems, students represent themselves differently than through social media, with different reasons for customizing their CMS profiles or resisting this customization all together. Students also have a different real-world context for using CMS than they do for using social media sites, especially when accessing information about their instructors.

Self-Representation in Course Management Systems

Profiles in course management systems function much like a professionalized Facebook profile, acting as what Van Der Heide et al. (2012) describe as a "real world context" for "impression formation" (p. 109). In lieu of the image-heavy social media profile, a course management system profile typically contains one image accompanied by text. A student's choice of profile picture is the greatest factor in their digital representation in their CMS profile, as their profile picture represents that student in all of their CMS-based interactions with their instructor and peers (Kear et al., 2014). Customizing a profile image greatly impacts impression

formation not only with other students but also with instructors, especially if that student is enrolled in several classes on the same CMS system.

If customizing CMS profiles through adding an image and text affects so many of their CMS-based interactions, why do so few students choose to customize? Students have become more accustomed to customizing their course management profiles since 2006 (Kear et al., 2014). However, even Millennial students resist profile customization for various reasons. A major theme running through the research is the issue of student privacy, especially in their online interactions with their instructors (Souleles, 2012; Kear et al., 2014). Students value separating their personal lives and their academic lives (Skeels and Grudin 2009). This desire for privacy and boundaries provides motivation not only for why students and instructors prefer using course management systems for class, rather than using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter but also for the lack of student customization of CMS profiles (Souleles, 2012; Kear et al., 2014).

Although privacy and boundaries are important to students, they are not the only reasons that students resist customizing their profiles. Another reason that students do not customize their course management profiles is usability. Finding the social tools in CMS can challenge some students, especially those without much prior experience with and access to technology. As these social customization tools can be difficult to find and use, students are much less likely to customize their profiles, or even be aware that the option for adding a profile picture exists (Chou, Peng, and Chang, 2010). This lack of usability is a glaring example of how confines in CMS programming and application deeply affect the communication process between instructor and student, curtailing use of the course management system as a whole (Dahlstrom et al., 2014).

In contrast, there are some students who do customize their CMS profile with either an image, text or both. The types of images they upload as a CMS profile picture is an untouched area of study. Motivations for this customization vary: profile conventions, friendliness, and assigned customization all factor in. In Kear et al.'s study (2014), students were asked why they customized their CMS profiles: for convention and for friendliness/community-building. In the truly eloquent words of one student, "I just normally do when I'm on a forum. It seemed the convention" (p. 11). If CMS profile customization is a convention, then it is one that many students seem to ignore.

Those students who customize their CMS profiles because of friendliness and/or community-building seem to have a different understanding of why they added an image and text. When asked why they chose to customize, students answered, "'Community spirit—share some carefully chosen info with other students for friendliness' and 'To give a better understanding of who I am and what I'm aiming towards'" (Kear et al., 2014, p. 10). These students seem to fit with the often-touted idea of Millennial-generation as "digital learners:" students who wish to share information and who are reasonably technologically adept (M. Romero et al., 2013, p. 159).

While it is no surprise that although Millennials are immersed in digital and social media Dahlstrom, Brooks, and Bichsel (2014) suggest that transfer between social media and course management systems is not as strong as previously thought. Students have different real-world contexts for customizing profiles on a CMS than they do on social media websites. Students use profiles, forums, and other interactive features in course management systems for educational purposes, not social ones. Therefore, many students resist customizing their profiles as if they

want to learn more about their classmates, they will ask in person, send a text message, or friend the person on Facebook (Kear et al., 2014).

Does Profile Customization Affect Student Learning?

While CMS research generally encourages profile customizations, researchers debate whether students customizing their course management system profiles actually affects student learning (Chou, Peng, & Chang, 2010). Some researchers state that customization makes no difference (M. Romero et al., 2013) and that the lack of transfer between social media and CMS (Dahlstrom et al., 2014) means that instructors should concentrate their efforts on other areas of the course. As Peng et al. (2008) suggested, “Future research efforts may focus on the relationships between technical interactions and cognitive interactions among learners...” (p. 63). Like Peng, most researchers agree that more research should be conducted on both student learning needs and technical skillsets, and how the limitations of current CMS could be mitigated or reworked entirely to fit this need.

To this end, social presence in CMS through profile customization heavily depends on how the instructor and students foster community with one another (Gunawardena and Zittle, 1997). To this end, Kear et al. noted that “...learners can find text-based online environments impersonal, because of the lack of communication cues such as facial expression and tone of voice” (Kear et al., 2014, p. 1). Customizing profiles combats this impersonality by enabling students to collaborate and learn with one another as people (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Aubry, 2013). Not only do customized profiles enable students to get to know one another, they personalize the learning experience by adding a human element: nonverbal immediacy. Bhat and Herman (2013) state, “That nonverbal immediacy behaviors positively affect student motivation, participation and attendance, affective and cognitive learning in classroom scenarios...” (p. 1).

Creating this community and positive social identity in the classroom can be a great asset for learning, but some kinks still need to be worked out.

Professionalism in CMS Profiles

While instructors either generally feel neutral toward or support student profile customization in CMS, what happens when students customize their profiles with an unprofessional picture? Some students, especially in first-year composition, have not yet developed an understanding of what constitutes professional academic behavior. Customizing their CMS picture with photos from the beach or a party could potentially hurt instructor perceptions and lead to negative impression formation. When negative impression formation occurs, Van Der Heide et al. (2012) found that “text-based self-disclosures can significantly affect an observer’s judgment of a target” (p. 109). In this case, students’ text-based cues might not be enough to overcome their lapse of judgment. Instructors could form negative bias from student pictures which could carry over into student grading/treatment.

How Students Use Instructors’ Profiles

While instructors often view and see their students CMS profiles, how do students view and use instructors’ customizations? When studying how students used their instructor’s Facebook profile, Aubry discovered that “online teacher self-disclosure using Facebook promotes a shift in motivation type... from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation” (Aubry, 2013, p. 86). This motivation shift caused by students having access to some personal information about their instructor encouraged some students to engage with the course more than they otherwise would have (Aubry, 2013) although students still formed their online contacts with the instructor similar to how they would have in a real-world context (Raad et al., 2011). Other CMS research has found that students in an online classroom work harder and learn better when they have

access to nonverbal cues from their instructors (Bhat and Herman, 2013.) These findings confirm that students like having personal information about their instructors beyond office hours and research interests; they connect with instructors more if they have information about their instructors' favorite movies, hobbies, etc. (Aubry, 2013), although some students would rather not self-disclose information about their personal lives (Kear et al., 2014).

Students also have different needs and preferences for nonverbal cues and profile customizations than instructors do. "Take "chat rooms/messaging" as an example: the instructional designers preferred synchronous communicative channels, while learners preferred not having to chat with the instructor in a synchronous fashion" (Peng et al., 2008, p. 60). CMS systems are designed by instructors and educational experts. CMS designers may have greater success in reaching students if they gave students' wants and needs greater emphasis.

Student and instructors have different communication goals and different social contexts for profile customization. An instructor may also be involved in graduate classes or professional groups on a course management system; therefore, an instructor's profile customization will have different rhetorical goals than a student's profile that has only been customized for a first-year composition class. While researchers have examined the student perception of digital representation on course management websites (Aubry, 2013; Raad et al., 2011; Chou et al., 2010; Kear et al., 2014), the instructor perspective of CMS profile customization remains unexamined.

Instructor Perception of Student Profiles

While students' perceptions about other students, CMS profile customization and students' perceptions about instructors have been studied, the instructors' perceptions of student profile customization opens a new and exciting window into pedagogical theory, visual rhetoric,

and best practices for social presence on course management websites. Previous research debates the impact of profile customization on course management systems; while we know how customization affects students, no formal research exists on how student CMS profile customization affects instructors. Anecdotal evidence and best teaching practices suggest that profile customization positively affects instructor perceptions of student. Peng et al. (2008), ask researchers to examine CMS interactivity, including CMS profile customization, through the instructor's perspective:

In terms of the learner-centered approach and the instructor-centered approach, what are teachers' perceptions of the use of interactive functions? And do technically interactive functions that characterize a ULS enhance or hinder teachers' instructional practices? (p. 63)

To answer Peng et al.'s (2008) call for further research, my study will examine how instructors perceive student customization in CMS profiles; gathering and synthesizing this data will pioneer research about student digital representation and course management systems from the instructors' perspective. My study runs on two main research questions: that profile customization aids instructor memory and that student profile customizations helps students to learn.

Current research shows that instructors remember students who customize their CMS profiles better than students who do not customize their profiles for these reasons:

- When students do not customize, instructors experience “a lack of explicitness of photographic cues [that] leads those cues to be of less judgmental value than verbal cues” (Van Der Heide et al., 2012, p. 100).

- Customization of student profiles would aid instructors in remembering students and putting a name to the face when evaluating student work. Students' lack of "social presence" because of "visual anonymity" could mean "lack of accountability" (Kear et al., 2014, p. 2). To add a sense of humanity "and therefore greater accuracy" to their interactions with their instructors (Tebeaux and Dragga, 2012, p. 119), students should customize their profiles.

I believe that CMS profile customization encourages students to learn, especially since the majority of students today have grown up surrounded by social media profiles. While community-building in the classroom—whether face-to-face, hybrid, or online—cannot be forced, instructors can foster community building through profile customization and other getting-to-know-you activities, especially at the beginning of the semester (Kear et al., 2014). One way that instructors could encourage student self-disclosure on course management systems is to ask students to customize their CMS profiles at the beginning of each semester for a class activity.

Conclusion

To counter the impersonal elements of course management systems, I suggest, based on my study's results, that profile customization for both students and instructors acts as a means of creating social presence and fosters community in both the digital and face-to-face classrooms. If students complete work online, customized profiles will help instructors and other students to connect individual work with individual students, to aid with student transfer. To some extent, customized profiles do, in fact, help instructors to remember students and recall students' work. Instructors can then connect the individual student and their work when grading ("organizing

your writing through an outline you did on assignment 3 helped you organize your assignment 4) or in class (“Jane, please tell the class about what you wrote about in your homework”).

The act of creating an online profile involves self-disclosure of information which may be easier to obtain in face-to-face communication, whether through direct questioning or body language (Walther, 2002). The context of course management websites, however, may not support self-disclosure from students to instructors and vice versa. Even though instructor self-disclosure has been shown to have a positive impact on student motivation (Aubry, 2013), students may feel uncomfortable disclosing personal information to an instructor (Kear et al., 2014; Souleles, 2012).

In conclusion, while the impact that CMS profile customization has on student learning has been contested, my study will further research in digital representation, course management systems, and instructor perceptions of students and learning. Continued research in these fields is needed, especially involving instructor perceptions, is needed in order to make course management systems more usable, help instructors understand digital student learning, and to further understand how profiles interact as a rhetorical network.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter discusses the methods used in this exploratory study of how instructors at Iowa State University use CMS and their students' customized profiles. Many instructors at Iowa State University use Moodle as their course management system; Moodle is open-source and easy to customize. The number of sections of first-year composition as well as the number of graduate teaching assistants in the English Department makes for an ample research pool for studies like this one. Participants were selected on the basis of whether they had taught English 150 and/or 250 in the past year while using a CMS; all 41 survey participants met this criteria. Out of the 41 survey participants, 9 instructors were interviewed for more in-depth answers to the survey questions. Please see Appendix A for the research and interview questions.

Background

Even though nearly all English 150/250 instructors at Iowa State University (including teaching assistants) use course management systems, each instructor uses course management systems in a slightly different way. This use of course management system ranges from simply posting deadlines and homework assignments, to students submitting their assignments and receiving instructor feedback through the course management system interface. Instructors of ISUComm are free to select their CMS; many of them use Moodle. An open-source software popular for teaching ISUComm, Moodle is easy to customize on a departmental level, as well as for students to customize their own profiles. Moodle stands for "Modular Object Oriented Developmental Learning Environment" (C. Romero et al., 2008, p. 368). No matter how instructors use Moodle, their online interactions with students are still regulated by the Moodle

interface, which includes thumbnails of student profile pictures and links to individual personal profiles.

Instructors at Iowa State University do have class rosters with photos of students available through Access Plus; however, these photos are limiting in several ways. Each photo features the student in a stiff, unnatural pose against the same background for the student's identification card; these photos were taken during the student's first semester at Iowa State, which may be several semesters before the student takes English 150/250 (or other writing classes such as technical or business communication), so the student may have changed weight, hair color, etc. These class roster photos are not available on course management websites like Moodle, where the student-instructor interaction mainly occurs. Instructors could simultaneously view the photographic roster on Access Plus and grade through Moodle. Using both websites at once is not only cumbersome, but also an inaccurate portrayal of their students' photographic self-representations.

Profiles in course management systems act much like professionalized Facebook profiles; unlike the image-heavy Facebook profile, a course management system profile typically contains one picture accompanied by text. Although English 150/250 students at Iowa State University have the option to customize their Moodle profiles by adding a picture and/or a short piece of text about themselves, many students do not complete either form of customization (see Figure 2).

Although a student's name is a basic component of their profile, students must set up their names themselves on first log-in. Not all students capitalize their names, although all manage to spell their names correctly. The student's name appears next to all work they turn in,


on rosters, etc. The student's name also acts as a hyperlink to the student's individual profile.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
ISUComm Courses

Sara Doan: Public profile

[Home](#) → [My profile](#) → [View profile](#)

Sara Doan



Sara Doan is a graduate student in the Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication MA program at Iowa State University. Sara enjoys singing classical music, science fiction, and computers. Sara studied music history in Salzburg, Austria during Fall 2011.

Country	United States
City/town	Ames, IA
Course prof...	English 150: Critical Thinking and Communication (Sect. TA, S. Doan, F14) , English 150: Critical Thinking and Communication - BEST Learning

Figure 2: Instructor's Public Profile. This example of an instructor's customized profile contains a profile picture, a short textual autobiography, and a list of courses taken and or taught by that person.

Capitalizing, spelling, and punctuating their names correctly has a great impact on each student's ethos within the CMS.

The other text-based part of a student's Moodle profile is the list of courses taken with Moodle. At Iowa State University, this is usually English 150 and/or 250, the first-year composition sequence. The course lists are also hyperlinked; a click on a hyperlink sends viewers to the corresponding course management website. The hyperlinked course list seems innocuous; however, if an instructor sees that a particular student is taking English 150 for the third time, this may negatively affect a student's ethos with an instructor. On the other hand, if a student's course profile also lists several literature courses, this may boost the student's ethos with an instructor. While students' names, autobiographies, and course lists most likely do affect a student's profile, the profile picture seems to have the biggest impact on instructors'

perceptions because of the image's visual weight and frequent association with the students' work.

Participant Selection

Iowa State University's Foundation Communication course instructors were particularly suited to act as a research pool for this study. A large first-year composition program, ISUComm runs many sections of English 150 and 250 each semester and relies mainly on graduate teaching assistants and lecturers to teach these courses through a standardized curriculum. For the Spring 2015 semester, 55 teaching assistants and 24 lecturers taught English 150 and/or 250. ISUComm is also unusual in that its program teaches multimodal composing in written, oral, visual, and electronic modes and has begun implementing electronic portfolios in these courses.

Before implementing my survey via Qualtrics, I received IRB approval (#14-662) on January 9th, 2015. After piloting the survey with two current teaching assistants, I opened the survey on Qualtrics and emailed my participants. The survey ran from January 22 to January 27th, 2015; during that time, 41 instructors completed the survey. Three instructors started the survey, but did not finish; their answers are not included in these totals. Eighteen of the survey respondents volunteered to be interviewed for this study. After scheduling the interviews, nine of the instructors were interviewed between January 27th and February 2nd, 2015. The timing of surveys and interviews was intentional; during the first few weeks of the semester, instructors get to know their students in the classroom.

For participant selection, I used the snowball method. I reached out to participants I knew who had taught English 150/250 at Iowa State University within the last year. The personal connection I had with the recipients meant that they were more likely to respond than had I emailed the whole department. The snowball method of participant selection does have its

drawbacks; as many of my research participants were from Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication, this could have an effect on my results.

To select participants for my research, I used the department website to collect a list of teaching assistants and lecturers that I knew taught English 150 and/or 250 within the last calendar year. To do this, I contacted the 34 teaching assistants in my incoming cohort via email. I appealed to teaching assistants in the Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication MA program and the Rhetoric and Professional Communication PhD program via email and Facebook. In the email, I asked those who completed the survey to forward the survey link to other instructors. Thirty-eight teaching assistants and three lecturers completed the survey.

Out of the 18 respondents who volunteered to be surveyed, I interviewed 9. Most of the interviewees were PhD students, as PhD students generally have more teaching experience than MA students. A majority of the interviewees were in rhetoric and composition, although a few came from other areas of the department.

Survey Methodology

To begin the survey, the first four questions asked respondents if they had taught using a course management system within the last year (all had), about their class formats (online, hybrid, face-to-face), which course management system they use, and for which activities and which features of the course management systems that the respondents use in their classes. The survey also asked instructors how and why they interact with the course management systems in terms of viewing and grading student homework and assignments.

The next section of the survey asked instructors whether they had customized their course management system profiles and to describe their rationale for customizing or not. Questions 11-17 asked instructors about student customization: whether students customized their CMS

profiles, if instructors had asked students to customize and why, if instructors had viewed any student profiles and why, what impressions instructors formed of their students based on profile customization, if customized profiles affected instructor memory of these students, and whether instructors would ask their students to customize their profiles in future semesters. The survey ended with questions about instructor demographics: how many semesters they had taught at Iowa State University, age, gender, job title, and whether the instructor had a social media account. While students from different disciplines (creative writing, literature, etc.) from within the English Department completed the survey, I did not differentiate between disciplines or educational level (MA, MFA or PhD). The final question of the survey asked instructors to enter their email address if they were willing to complete a short interview.

Interview Methodology

The interview questions had three main purposes: to triangulate information collected through the survey process, to focus more deeply on how instructors use course management system profiles, and to connect instructors' perceptions of student performance to the learning outcomes of ISUComm. The first four questions, to help participants settle into the interview, asked instructors to describe how they used course management systems in teaching, if instructors had asked students to customize their profiles, and if any material in classes had covered identity or social media. The last three questions asked instructors about student performance connected to ISUComm: if profile customization suggested that students were more engaged in class, if students who customized were more technologically adept, and if students who customized were able to make more connections between in-class-work and out-of-class work, especially on the ISUComm portfolio.

Coding

To code the survey data, I read through the surveys to gather common themes within the answers. The five most common themes are as follows:

- instructors describing course management systems as spaces
- instructors describing course management systems as tools
- boundaries that overlap between the online and physical classrooms
- online impression formation
- comparisons between social media platforms and course management systems.

When coding the survey data, I used Qualtrics to compile a report that sorted the data by question, then coded all answers to each question according to theme. Each question contained material that fed into one of the main five themes, plus several smaller themes (such as instructors' dissatisfaction with Moodle gradebook or instructors' use of ISUComm Sites for ePortfolios).

When writing up the survey results, I went through my coded data for each question and pulled out answers relevant to each of the five major themes. I then used the interview data to supplement the survey results with qualitative data. The data that follows represents the feelings and opinions of the 41 instructors who responded for this study in relation to CMS and student profile customization at Iowa State University.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study has found that instructors use their course management systems in various ways: as online syllabi, as workshops for their students, as homework hubs, and to extend the classroom online. Five main themes from this study include course management systems as a space, course management systems as a resource, boundaries between the physical and online classrooms, creating online identities, and course management systems versus social media.

Virtual Spaces and Tools

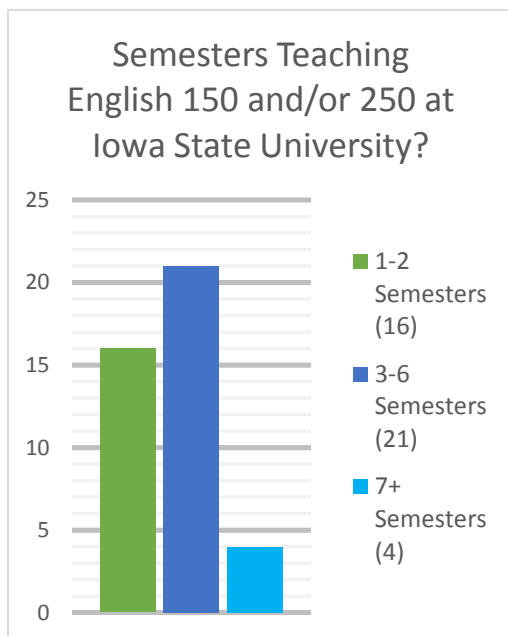


Figure 3. A majority instructors surveyed had been teaching at Iowa State University for at least 3 semesters by the time of this survey.

The 41 instructors who participated in this study were a fairly representative sample of those teaching English 150 and 250 at Iowa State University. The participants included 7 males and 34 females who had all taught English 150 or 250 using a CMS within the past year. Sixteen of the respondents were in their first or second semesters of teaching at Iowa State University at the time of the survey (see Figure 4). The majority of the respondents had taught between 3 and 6 semesters, and a minority of 4 respondents had been teaching for 7+ semesters at Iowa State University. Of the survey respondents, 36 worked as graduate teaching assistants.

Three respondents were lecturers in the department and one respondent identified as “other” (see Figure 4). The graduate teaching assistant who replied to this question as “other” and insisted that the title “graduate teaching assistant” was an “unfair and misleading title” was counted with the rest of the teaching assistants.

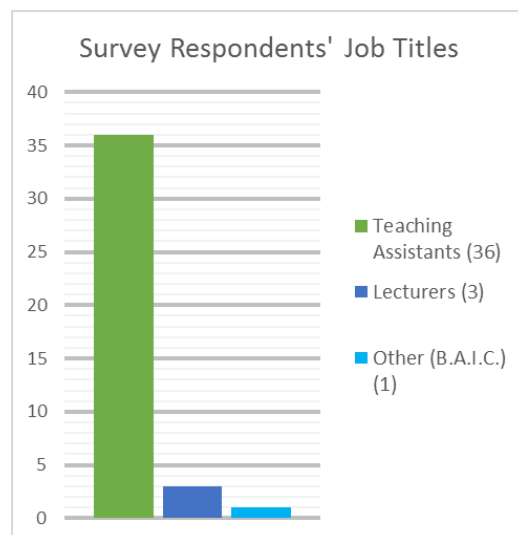


Figure 4. 88% of survey respondents worked as graduate teaching assistants.

Course management systems as spaces

One of the most pervasive descriptions of CMS was instructors describing the online sites in terms of space. These mentions of collaborative, interactive space included mentioning the CMS as a space for posting information, as a “where” for finding information

Instructors had several ways of using their CMS for their teaching. The most common way for instructors to organize their CMS was to create a section for each class session containing the day’s topic and assigned homework. These sites act as an “online syllabus” or an “information hub.” Instructors also mentioned using their CMS to share assignment sheets and resources linking outside information, such as the Purdue OWL. Using CMS to post information also led several instructors to project the website in class: “I will refer to readings and assignments posted on Moodle during class, and I will sometimes show where things are posted on Moodle on the screen.” Showing students “where” resources are located on CMS reinforces the idea of CMS as distinct virtual places, often organized chronologically instead of physically.

The “where”-ness of learning with CMS parallels a student’s experience on a physical campus. Like students find the physical sites of their classrooms, students must also find the

virtual sites of their classrooms. This often happens on the first day (or first lab day) of classes at Iowa State University. However, as with physical spaces on campus, virtual spaces can be bewildering and anxiety-ridden for students who are now navigating a whole new set of physical and virtual contexts and expectations. Students can “find Moodle confusing” just as they can find campus to be a confusing place to navigate, especially if these students do not have much prior technological literacy.

Like many students who gain familiarity and confidence in face-to-face classrooms, students can use the CMS as “collaborative space[s],” using these websites for collaborative composing, in-class and out-of class writing, and as a supplement to the physical space or a “homework center.” Instructors chimed in on this; they encourages students to find “where they need to post journals” and other homework as a way of “practicing digital literacies.” Many CMS have the functionality for peer response; some instructors used this functionality within the website, while others encouraged students to collaborate via Google Docs, then post a reflection or a worksheet to the CMS.

Many instructors mentioned posting content to the CMS, whether the instructors themselves posted or had their students post material. One instructor mentioned that they “do not post a week by week, day by day syllabus online,” as students already have access to this document. Another instructor mentioned that they “find it most useful for posting course announcements, storing class documents for students to access...”. The action and idea of posting content evoke a physical bulletin board; this idea of posting to a virtual bulletin board is one of the many ways that online spaces mimic physical spaces, especially in the virtual and face-to-face classrooms.

A few other instructors' described the CMS as a container, saying "[the CMS] holds everything we do in class." This idea of the CMS as a repository was mentioned mainly by instructors who used CMS in an all-encompassing format. The idea of a CMS as a container means that everything (grades, homework, assignments, feedback) exists in one place that "contains everything relevant to the course" for instructors and students alike.

For one instructor, having their students submit assignments and homework online had a unique pedagogical implication: practicing digital literacies through interacting with CMS: "I also think this [digital feedback] is the way the world is going, not just academia, and it's beneficial for students to have experience in these kinds of mediated environments." Giving students the tools to manage, navigate, and interact within online spaces enables students' readiness to find their way through life beyond their four years in college.

One of the biggest tools students can learn in these online spaces is how to present themselves through creating and customizing user profiles. Much digital representation is generated through visuals, as this instructor explains: "I added a picture to my profile so that I have a visual presence for my online persona." Instructors creating these online personas "[encourages] students to share pictures and a bit about themselves, which helps with the class environment," especially for interaction through online spaces. Too many "faceless user[s]" make CMS feel sterile and anonymous instead of presenting these online spaces as places to collaborate

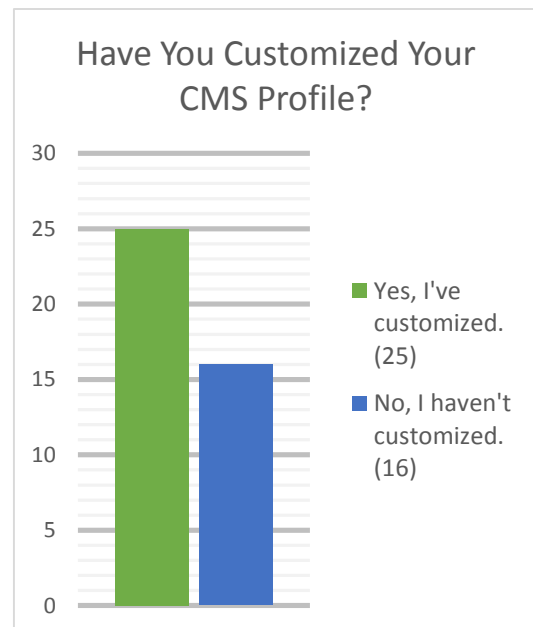


Figure 5. Despite not all having a positive attitude toward profile customizations, 61% of instructors surveyed had customized their CMS profiles.

and learn. Another instructor mentioned that customizing their profile was a model for their students to then do the same.

Although many instructors didn't use their students' profiles, the majority of instructors did customize their own online spaces (see Figure 5). Six of the instructors who customized their profile added just a picture. Eighteen instructors—or 75%—who customized their profile pictures also added text to complete their profile. Of the 41 instructors surveyed, 25 instructors actually customized their profiles through adding a picture or both a picture and text.

Course management systems as resources

The second way in which instructors described CMS was as a resource or tool. Several instructors described their CMS in terms of use: “We use [our CMS] to aid communication instead of email and paper.” Several instructors also conceptualized their CMS as a tool for orienting students, or to “disseminate information about the course.” One instructor wrote, “I use the bare minimum, since most of my students find Moodle confusing.” Another instructor compensated for their students' confusion with CMS by projecting the CMS onto the screen during class, saying, “I use my CMS to let my student (sic) know the schedule and plan for the day, as well as posting useful links for the day.”

Like this instructor, many instructors mentioned specific tools that they used their CMS to help their students access: “In our lab day, I try to use Moodle for journals, etc.” Another popular tool was the forums function found in CMS.

Several instructors mentioned the convenience of electronic grading through the CMS instead of grading paper copies. While many instructors viewed CMS negatively or ambivalently, the majority of them used tools like electronic grading and the online gradebooks that CMS provides. Instructors seem to find Microsoft Word, video screencasts, and

automatically graded quizzes to be easiest for grading on course management systems; one of them observed, “It is easy to download student work and record or upload my response.” Many instructors mentioned the advantages of the online grading tools in CMS, including saving the environment through eliminating paper, not carrying around physical papers, keeping a copy of students’ work to reference later, and easy record keeping to track late assignments. Several instructors mentioned the ease for students to submit papers electronically.

Some instructors mentioned using their CMS only in specific contexts: “I only use it in class during lab days, when I post links so students can follow along with my presentation -- if it's about web rhetoric -- or do online class activities and discussion forums for student response.” For other instructors, CMS’s are tools for students to use outside of the face-to-face classroom: “I use [the CMS] much more for managing assignments than I do for actual instruction (in-class time).” Only a minority of instructors use Moodle directly for in-class instructions (workshops, etc.), although many instructors use Moodle in class for activities such as accessing outside websites.

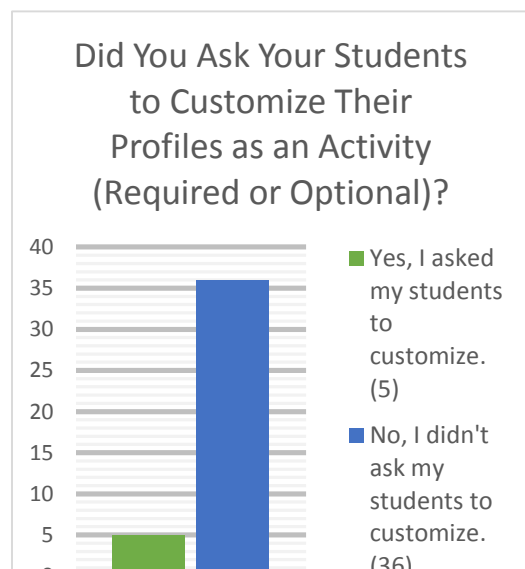


Figure 6. 88% of instructors did not ask their students to customize CMS profiles.

With so many instructors using CMS as tools to simply augment homework and time outside of class, it’s little surprise that many instructors who discussed CMS in terms of tools or functionalities viewed profile customization negatively. Only 5 of the 41 instructors surveyed had asked their students to customize their CMS profiles for an in-class activity (see Figure 6). Twenty of the 38 instructors who responded about using their students customized

profiles expressed that they do not care about/would not use their students' CMS profiles because they could not see a pedagogical purpose for asking students to customize. The constraint of audience within the course management system was one of the guiding factors behind this idea that "no one cares to read their profiles" and "I'm not sure I'd use it [if] they did." Those most opposed to profile customization cited the CMS's functionality as a tool, rather than a space, saying, "Since I use Moodle as an educational and informational tool, I don't feel that personal customization is needed." Another instructor mentioned that "[Customization] doesn't really seem to be relevant to my course content or related to my current uses of the website."

Although profile customization is a tool like a discussion forum or a journal entry, instructors seemed opposed to customization, wanting students to concentrate on the coursework: "I don't want students to dedicate a large amount of time customizing their page (unless it's on their own time)--I want them to focus on using Moodle for largely educational purposes." Another instructor mentioned lack of student interest in one another's customized profiles:

I figure no one cares to read their profiles. Moodle is just a tool to them, not a fun game like Facebook. They don't want to dawdle there. They want to get in and get out. And for that matter, so do I.

The contrast between instructors who believe that CMS are a waste of students' time and those instructors who view CMS as spaces for teaching digital literacies could not be more stark. While some instructors complain about the lack of profile utility, other instructors have transformed CMS profiles into a useful in (or out of) class activity. For example, of the 39 instructors who answered the survey question about viewing their students' CMS profiles, 30 answered "No," 5 answered "yes," and 4 had responses in between (see Figure 7). When asked if

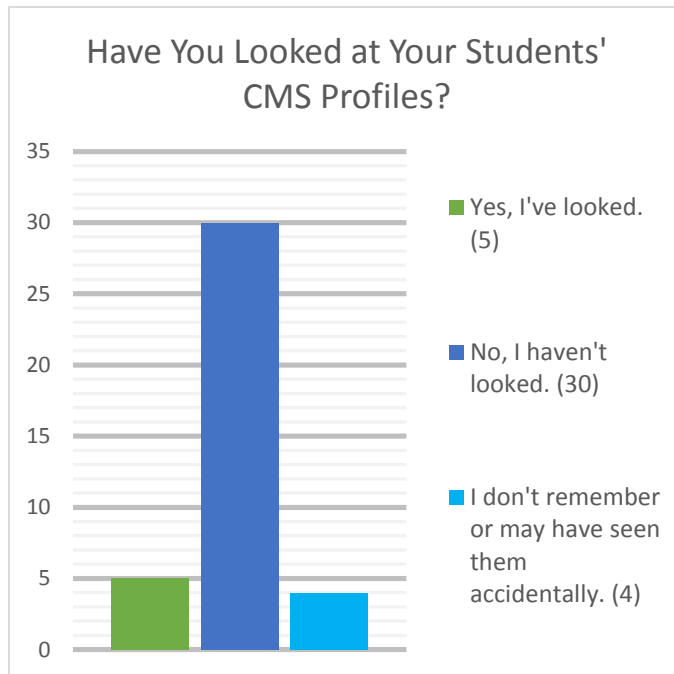


Figure 7. The majority of instructors indicated that they did not seek out their students' CMS profiles.

they viewed student profiles, one instructor said, “No...I don't want to hang out and browse on Moodle. It's strictly a functional utility for me.” A different instructor mentioned that they only used CMS to “[assess] their work digitally” as this instructor normally interacted with students in person. One aspect where profiles were useful for instructors was to access students' email addresses, which can be found on students' Moodle

profiles (customized or non-customized).

Still, two instructors have explicitly noticed that students with customized profiles use CMS differently than students with non-customized profiles: “Students who customize their profiles tend to use the system more, so I model this as the instructor. Also, I just don't like being associated with an anonymous placeholder icon.” But overall, the consensus seems to be that neither instructors nor students really use CMS profiles, customized or not and “haven't been sold on the utility of it.”

Course management systems as working-spaces

Most instructors talked about their CMS in terms of a tool or resource, but a significant minority of instructors also described their CMS as a space and a resource. The ideas of CMS as a resource or as a space were not mutually exclusive: sometimes instructors spoke of CMS as both in the same sentence. “The course website is used as an information hub and as the

homework center for the students.” Hubs and centers are labels most often given to practical spaces used for work. Another instructor continues this theme: “essentially I use Moodle as an informational tool where I post info on the class and provide links to any outside sources.” This intersection of tools and space in online sites is not the only junction between ideas and uses for CMS; the survey data also revealed how instructors use CMS to bridge and boundary the physical and online classrooms.

Boundaries and Bridges: Physical and Online Classrooms

Depending on their attitudes toward their CMS in their teaching, instructors used their CMS in several different ways. One way instructors used their CMS was in the physical classroom, showing students where content was posted or having students complete in-class activities and submit these activities through the CMS. Another way instructors used their CMS was outside the physical classroom, as a “homework hub” or as a way to extend the classroom through the online interface. Still, most instructors used their CMS as a combination of both the physical and online classrooms. This use was not without challenges, as many instructors mentioned technological hurdles in their CMS use, whether in the physical or online classroom.

In the physical classroom

In the physical classroom, instructors use CMS in a number of different ways: for hands-on work, or for orienting students, thus strengthening their teaching. One instructor “refer[s] to readings and assignments posted on Moodle during class, and I will sometimes show where things are posted on Moodle on the screen.” There are other uses for CMS as tools: to introduce homework, to visually support explanations of the class’s current place within a unit, and, as one instructor said, to access “useful links for the day.” Other instructors use CMS to allow their

students to do in-class activities “if in class activities used websites, the links and instructions are in moodle (sic).” Another instructor wrote, “They also use Moodle in class to submit quick writes, to access resources we use for the day, and to submit peer review papers.” While the CMS has some limitations, many instructors found that asking students to submit work online meant easier accountability for their students because the CMS records when students actually submit assignments, journals, and other homework.

In contrast, other instructors use their CMS “as more of a reference source for students to refer back to for syllabus information, rubrics, assignment descriptions.” This separation from in-class work means that the CMS exists “to give students a basic layout of the course, day-by-day” or as a way “to house grades and feedback...”

A large factor in whether instructors embedded CMS use in their face-to-face classroom is their class’s physical access to technology. Several instructors mentioned using their CMS or other virtual spaces and resources more during lab days than during classroom days:

During lab classes, I post links and activities on Moodle. Then I have students complete a task and submit it on Moodle. For instance, they might read a short article I had uploaded onto Moodle as a pdf. Then they would type their response to questions and submit them on Moodle.

Another instructor mentioned that they used their CMS more heavily because their class met in a laptop classroom every session:

Our daily schedule is available on the Moodle site, as well as online/electronic resources that we will use for the day's class. It helps that I teach in a laptop classroom where we have access to computers and Moodle whenever.

Although many instructors taught with or referred to their CMS while teaching in the physical classroom, these instructors also cited their engagement with students in the physical classroom as a deterrent to encouraging CMS profile customization. This is unfortunate, because these instructors only interact in person with their students for up to 150 minutes per week for a Monday-Wednesday-Friday course. When asked if they had looked at students' CMS profiles, several instructors mentioned that they preferred meeting their students face-to-face in the physical classroom rather than interact online. One instructor wrote that they "would rather connect with students one-on-one or face-to-face rather than learn details about them through Moodle." As these same instructors generally cited the lack of time available to get to know their students, this negative attitude toward their students' public profiles may be worth further exploration.

Instructors also mentioned that seeking out students' profiles for biographical information took extra time that they did not want to spend getting to know their students. Another instructor mentioned not being able to find the CMS profile feature: "No - don't know where or how to find them, don't care to -- maybe also that I learn a lot about my students in their writing or public speaking, so I don't feel that I'm at a loss." Because students' profiles are hyperlinked to their work on CMS, these profiles are actually not difficult to seek out. Overall, the majority of instructors wrote negatively about profiles as a whole. For the instructors, the distinction was using their CMS for "assessing [students'] work digitally" and therefore were happy to reserve the virtual space of the CMS for grading and feedback on students' work.

A minority of instructors, however, did positively mention viewing of students' online profiles. When asked about how viewing the profiles affected the instructors' impressions of the students, one instructor answered, "My impression stayed mostly the same. Most of what they

put up was information that had also come out during classes.” Another instructor extended this thought, adding, “Maybe if I was teaching online only it would be more important to have students create profiles.”

In the survey, instructors gave many reasons that English 150 and 250 instructors do not encourage their students to customize their CMS profiles:

- “I have done personal introductions in our face-to-face class settings, so I never saw a need to give students more work by having them do this online.”
- “I would rather have [students] talk and get to know each other in person.”
- “Also, I get information about the students on the first day of class during ice breakers, so I already know some of their background.”
- “Usually for the first week of classes, I have the students take an introductory questionnaire.”
- “Again, I guess I’m focused on our interactions in the classroom. Though I’m certainly not opposed to [students] customizing their profiles, it’s not something I’ve asked them to do.”
- “I did not ask students to customize their pages because their online interaction through the course website is a negligible part of the course.”

Overall, this data shows that the use of CMS in the classroom varies by instructor and by physical access to technology. While a few instructors create online workshops and collaborative opportunities for students in the physical classroom, many of the instructors surveyed either use their CMS as little as possible or to duplicate activities from the physical classroom. CMS have an enormous potential for transformative learning and for promoting digital literacy, but instructors here don’t seem to be using CMS to its fullest potential.

In the online classroom

Like the idea of the CMS merely duplicating or extending the physical classroom, many of the instructors surveyed thought of the online classroom as a transposed version of the physical classroom instead of another independent entity. Still, this finding is not necessarily surprising because only three of the instructors surveyed had taught completely online courses within the past year. Not only would this survey probably provide a different set of answers if the questions were administered to instructors who solely taught online, but also the survey would provide more reliable data on how online instructors actually use students' CMS profiles, instead of face-to-face instructors hypothesizing about using profiles more frequently when teaching online, had there been more results to draw from.

In contrast, results of the survey included instructors who felt that customizing profiles for an online course was “weird.” An interviewee who taught online courses revealed that their online students often customize their profiles by adding a profile picture. This interviewee also revealed that while they don't require their online students to customize, many still do.

Intersections of the physical and virtual classrooms

Many instructors mentioned that they would place more value on student profiles if they were teaching an online course. One non-online instructor said that they “Haven't felt the necessity [to customize their profile] because we meet face to face. If it was an online class, I would feel compelled to create the profile.” Another instructor mentioned that they would find the profile features if they were teaching an online class, as this instructor observed: “If I were entirely online, maybe I'd figure out how to find them --- I don't know where to find the students' profiles on BB or Moodle.” Still, this quotation reinforces the idea of the online classroom as a physical space with profiles acting as students and instructors within the space itself.

Still, other instructors resist customization in these online classrooms, saying that their interactions with students in the physical classroom mean that students don't need to access an instructor's profile:

“When I come to class each day, my students see me. I share small bits of information about myself that somehow become relevant as I teach. Besides, isn't mystery a kind of authority? Why make a paper cut-out of one's person so readily accessible? On multiple levels, I don't see the point. I suppose this would be more useful in establishing rapport if one primarily taught online courses, but this practice is of little use to me.”

Even though instructors only have about three contact hours with students per week in an English 150 or 250 course, that may not be enough time to truly get to know students and their work without visual and textual cues as to students' identities. For instructors who feel that they interact with students sufficiently to understand their students' work, customized CMS profiles serve them as basically a “paper cut-out” or “snapshot in time.” If the picture is the only information they take from the customization, this may be, to a certain degree true. However, students who take the time to insert their picture don't always stop there and also complete a textual autobiography. Still, what happens when students customize but add a picture that isn't actually of their face?

Conversely, one of the instructors who had taken an online course as a student mentioned that they didn't post a picture of their face:

“because (sic) the first time I used moodle (sic) was as a student in a n (sic) online course as a distance student and I got that email that moodle (sic) pretends is from the instructor saying that you should customize it and put a picture. I didn't (sic) know that it was an auto generated email and in the syllabus it mentioned something i (sic) mistook for this.

so i (sic) filled it out because i (sic) thought i (sic) had to as an assignment. But (sic) i (sic) put a picture but not of my face or anything, cuz (sic) that's weird in an online course.”

In addition, one of the biggest complaints from instructors focused on “forced” customization. When students or instructors created an account with Moodle, they received an email welcoming the new user to the site and asking that the user take a few minutes to customize their profiles. When asked why many of their students customized, one instructor wrote, “Unfortunately I bet my students received the same faux autogenerated (sic) email that I did so maybe they thought I asked them to because moodle (sic) makes it look this way.” This instructor is mistaken, as the email comes from Moodle, not from the instructor. Also, while this instructor views the email as “unfortunate,” other instructors, who encourage their students’ customization, beg to differ. The instructors who mentioned the welcoming email also mentioned that they disliked the fact that the email appeared that to be from the instructor.

While instructors may be uncomfortable with an email sent by Moodle asking new users to customize, this is simply a misunderstanding from the perspective of the instructor. All “invites” sent to students are actually generated from Moodle directly and not from the instructor or as a result of the instructors’ directive.

That said, a few instructors mentioned being uncomfortable asking students to customize their profiles, such as the instructor, cited above, who felt “weird” customizing their profile with a picture of their face. Other instructors felt that profile customization was “creepy,” “silly,” and even “invasive” to ask their students to do it or to do it themselves.

When asked about future semesters and having students customize, one instructor said, “If we all include photos on our Moodle sites, it will be easier to learn names and carry a

conversation.” The tension between instructors who mostly want their students to customize their profiles in an online course in contrast with the students feeling uncomfortable disclosing personal information, outlines the boundaries of the online and physical classrooms, reflects the idea of CMS as resources and/or spaces, and underscores the separation between the personal and professional aspects of students’ and instructors’ lives.

Technical hurdles

Even instructors who favored profile customization outlined the technological limitations of working with CMS in the classrooms. When students and instructors don’t customize their CMS profiles, the information is either left blank or filled in through the default settings. For example, on Moodle the thumbnail of their profile picture is filled by an isotypical outline of a person that is white against a blue background. This lack of color and detail could deter students and instructors from viewing CMS as a space, reinforcing the idea of the CMS as a strict collection of utilitarian functions. As one instructor wrote, “the default settings make you seem anonymous, which is not a good thing when collaborating, IMO.” Encouraging students to customize their profiles can help students to see their instructors and peers as people, instead of seeing a screen of blank thumbnails (Tebeaux and Dragga, 2012).

Other instructors in the survey wrote about technological issues that they had when attempting to customize or to encourage their students to customize in class. These technological hurdles included both students and instructors not being able to find the tools, students adding and dropping the course at the beginning of the semester, and the way in which some CMS are set up to support or discourage customization.

Blackboard is a perfect example of a CMS that has been set up to discourage customization. Blackboard does have an option for customizing a user profile, but the user must

first create an account on the third-party site Myedu. Then the users fill in their personal information and grant Blackboard the permission to distribute their personal information in any way that the company sees fit. Frequent updates of the Blackboard system also bars users from easy profile customization, as users must relearn the customization process after each system upgrade. Setting up profile customization in this way certainly does not encourage students and instructors to customize their user profiles.

Another main deterrent for profile customization is the technology itself. Reiterating a previous argument in this paper about physical access to technology in the classroom, one instructor mentioned, “[Student profile customization] was my goal recently, but I was hindered in my first day of class because the lab I teach in only had a handful of computers working.” The physically present technology and the technological literacy levels of the students and instructor seem to be correlated with how many students in each course customize their CMS profiles.

Several instructors also mentioned customizing their profiles because this was required for their graduate courses. The profiles that these instructors created for their class then “followed [them] into [their] teaching.” Other instructors who had customized their profiles mentioned that they had first customized during the teaching assistant orientation held the week before their first semester of teaching; these instructors almost all mentioned that their profiles were now out of date and should probably be updated.

Furthermore, instructors’ own technological knowledge and training contributed to how they interacted with profiles, customized or non-customized. In the words of one instructor, “I don’t see the need to [customize], but I’m not tech-savvy or focused on profile building especially through Moodle.” Another instructor cited their level of training with CMS:

“I didn't know it was possible and never considered the option with Blackboard, though when I used Moodle I mentioned to students it was an option. I'm not sure why the difference. I think because I was trained on Moodle but never trained on Blackboard. Blackboard I just figured out by myself.”

Essentially, instructors had varying attitudes toward CMS profile customization to which a variety of factors contributed. Training with CMS, the way to CMS was built to support or not support customization, access to technology, proficiency, and interest each contributed to how the instructors did or didn't use CMS profiles in the face-to-face and online classrooms.

Creating Identity: Online Impression Formation

Although instructors had various attitudes toward CMS and profile customizations, instructors' impressions of students who customized their profiles with a profile picture or biographical text were mostly positive. The only way students could create a negative impression of themselves with their instructors was through blurring boundaries between their academic and personal lives by posting an unprofessional image. While some students had preexisting reservations about posting pictures of their faces or information about themselves, those students who customized with an acceptable image were positively perceived by instructors. Students who customized were generally seen as more technologically adept and more engaged with the course, although instructors did not necessarily perceive any transfer between these technological skills and the students' work, even in assignments containing electronic components.

While the majority of instructors did not require their students to customize their CMS profiles, they formed mostly positive impressions of the students who had customized. One instructor wrote, “Students who voluntarily modify their profile seem more conscientious [sic] to me.” Like the instructor who mentioned that they customized their profile so that students would

form a positive impression of an instructor who “cares about the details,” students who customized were perceived as detail oriented and “usually more motivated than those that don't.” Essentially, instructors who didn’t explicitly ask their students to customize CMS profiles perceived the students who did customize as “A students who would normally go to such lengths” because “there are so few profile pictures that when a student provides one it really sticks out.” While the correlation between students who customize their profiles and students who are engaged in the class cannot be explicitly proven at this point, one instructor did sum up some instructors’ thoughts toward profile customization, saying “none of my worst students ever customized their profiles.”

Other instructors focused on students’ engagement in class. Writing about students who customize their CMS profiles, one instructor stated, “I tend to see these students as a little bit more engaged online and in the classroom.” Another instructor focused on the amount of time students spent on the CMS site, saying, “I felt that they had spent a little more time on our Moodle site than students that hadn't uploaded photos.” This appearance of engagement and time spend on the CMS led several instructors to describe the students who customized as “more tech-savvy.”

Two instructors also responded that after viewing customized student profiles that their memory of the students who customized improved. A few instructors even noted that customized profiles were helpful in getting to know their quieter students: “...overall, [a customized profile] sheds some light on who those students are before I've had the chance to get to know them in class.” Another instructor mentioned that “[profiles] helped me to remember who they were/connect names and faces.” For instructors who teach with Moodle, this is especially important as thumbnails of students’ profile pictures appear next to all work that the students

submit. Because thumbnails of profile pictures appear so often, students must be able to analyze their audience for their profiles: their peers and, most often, their instructors.

Students could be concerned with their instructor as their audience; one interviewee mentioned that knowing their instructor is reading their profiles might affect their customization. Instructors were generally more positive, noting that audience awareness is something they teach their students to think about, especially when customizing their profiles: “I thought it was cute that [students] took the time to do it or add their picture. I thought that they had thought about how they want to present themselves.” One of the things that a multimodal composition course should teach is how to present oneself online; a large part of that is audience analysis. Another instructor, who had their students submit all of their assignments through ISUComm Sites wrote:

“I usually feel one of two ways after seeing my students' introductions on their Sites: 1) They're cool people who have interesting experiences, skills, and talents, and I'm glad to have assigned this to get to know them a bit better. 2) They, like most of us, have trouble writing about ourselves and conceptualizing an audience beyond the teacher. They have a couple of sentences about how they're in an English class and welcome to their website.”

Teaching students to “conceptualize” their audience is a key rhetorical skill, one that students will probably use frequently in their lives after college. Customizing their profiles, especially on ISUComm Sites where the impetus for reaching their audience is embedded more smoothly than on a CMS like Moodle or Blackboard could be a key way to teach students to customize online profiles in a professional manner.

Surveillance: Moodle's grading interface as Panopticon

In Moodle, the grading interface fits Barton and Barton's (1993) definition of a Panopticon as a visual “site of power inscription” (p. 138). The interface through which

instructors grade in Moodle acts like a Panopticon: on a single screen, the instructor sees the thumbnail of the students' profile pictures (see Figure 8). The customized profile pictures appear here, while the non-customized profile pictures are replaced with an isotypical white icon of a male-type figure against a pale blue background. The students' names are just to the right of the profile pictures and hyperlink to the students' profiles. To the right are the students' email addresses. Next come the students' assignment submissions statuses, grades, and feedback. On the grading screen, the instructor has access to each student's grade report and profile, paralleling the idea of the guards in the center of the Panopticon. Like the guards' ability to view any cell in the prison synoptically, instructors have the ability to view any of their students' information at any time, while revealing (or not revealing) information about themselves.



Surname First name ▲	Email address	Course total ▲
 [Name]	[Email]	80.08
 [Name]	[Email]	77.98
 [Name]	[Email]	78.77

Figure 8: Moodle's Grading Interface as Panopticon. This truncated version of the Moodle grading interface shows a panopticon-like effect where the instructor can view all students' data while not necessarily being observed by the students.

Some instructors, like the guards in the panopticon tower, see their resistance of self-disclosure to their students as a form of power. One instructor, responding to the question of why they customized or didn't customize their CMS profile, wrote:

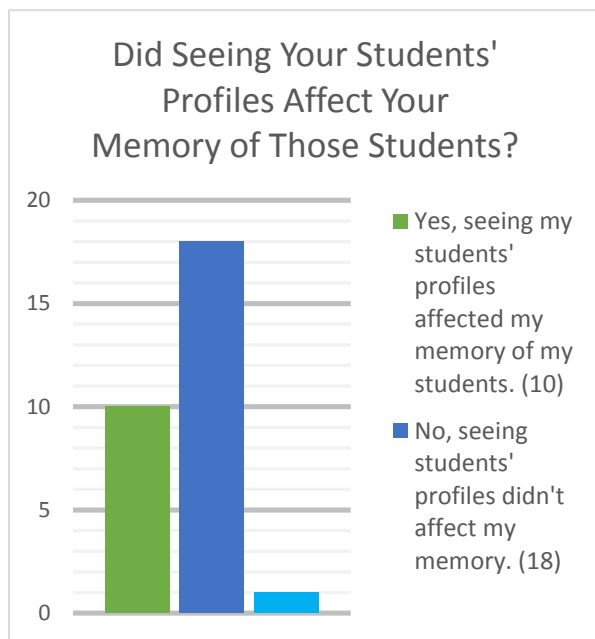
When I come to class each day, my students see me. I share small bits of information about myself that somehow become relevant as I teach. Besides, isn't mystery a kind of

authority? Why make a paper cut-out of one's person so readily accessible? On multiple levels, I don't see the point...

While it does reinforce boundaries between personal and professional life, this idea of withholding personal information from students is rather dictatorial. Although not much research exists on how students use their instructors' customized CMS profiles, Aubry (2013) shows that students who had access to a reasonable amount of personal information about their instructor were more intrinsically motivated than students who did not have this information. This research suggests that instructors' profiles help to balance power dynamics in the classroom, serving more purpose than just to "make [the CMS] pretty."

Pedagogical purpose of profiles

Along with helping students to learn audience analysis skills, customized profiles have some impact on instructor memory. While the link between customized profiles and instructor memory should be studied at more length, instructor memory did appear in the survey results. Three instructors specifically mentioned that customized student profiles helped them better



remember those students. One instructor wrote, "It is nice to have a face to put with the student name; however, I really don't feel that this is essential." A major factor for instructor memory was the face that most students don't customize their CMS profiles: "For one thing, there are so few profile pictures that when a student provides one it really sticks out."

Furthermore, 10 of the 29 instructors who answered the question “Did this profile affect

Figure 9. *Question 14 asked instructors whether seeing students' CMS profiles affected their memory of students and students' work.*

your memory of those particular students and/or their work?”, 18 answered negatively, and 10 answered positively (see Figure 9). One answer

was in the middle: “No, the students who have uploaded a picture are usually good students who I remember for going above and beyond. I think I would have remembered them regardless.”

As 10 of the 29 instructors did answer positively to the question, customized profiles as an aid to instructor memory has potential as a site for further research. “Perhaps. Seeing faces does seem to aid in memory, but of course I have to remember just names, so maybe not all that much.” Still, the associations instructors made between students’ profiles and students’ work varies. One instructor wrote, “Having the student's picture present directly next to their work helps me form an even stronger association between the student and their work.” Another said, “[Students who customize] stand out to me because I assume that they are more interested in our course.”

Five other instructors mentioned that while they remember students who customize their profiles “more vividly” than students who don’t customize, the profiles don’t affect how the instructors perceive students’ work. While one instructor wrote, “When I see a particular student in class, I can recall that she has a picture in her profile,” it doesn’t seem to affect students work. As a different instructor theorized, “probably only because one or two students out of each section do it, making it remarkable.” These instructors are impressed with students who customize mostly because they did not require students to customize their CMS profiles:

“In my case the profile did affect my memory of the student, but the confounding variable is that I didn't ask/require them to do so, and was hence pleasantly surprised

when they did. Had I required all students to complete a profile it would not have been as "special" when I saw completed profiles. But maybe it would affect my memory even if I had required it.”

Time also seems to have an effect on instructors’ awareness of student customization. This survey took place during Weeks 2-3 of the semester, when instructors were focused on getting to know their students. The beginning of the semester is a very busy time for students and instructors; the survey data reflected this, with 6 instructors mentioning the lack of time for customization. One instructor wrote, “Yes, [customization] helps me remember [students] at the start of a semester.” On the other hand, customized profiles seem to matter less this instructor: “especially as the semester progressed and I was more focused on what [students] were doing in class.”

Other instructors use pictures from AccessPlus (where students sign up for courses and instructors can access course rosters with student photos). Although this instructor didn’t use customized CMS profiles, they did seek out information (including pictures) about their students outside of class. When asked if having this information affected this instructor’s memory, they wrote, “No. I did look at some of their pictures on AccessPlus, hoping that this might help me learn their names more quickly, but it didn't work.”

Although some instructors mentioned that customized student profiles may help instructors to learn students’ names or remember students, almost twice as many instructors said that customized student profiles had no effect that they “consciously took in.” Other instructors mentioned that student profiles had a negligible effect on their memory of students; one instructor wrote, “i (sic) guess not because I can't remember at all.” Another instructor stated that he or she graded paper feedback, which means he or she they didn’t use the CMS grading

interface to evaluate student work, “No, especially since I mainly have students turn their work in in hard copy form.”

For one instructor, there wasn’t much difference between student customization in terms of the written autobiography versus adding a profile picture. This instructor said, “I can’t even remember who had written something or if they had just added a picture. I might be confusing their Google/Cymail account with Moodle because you can also add pictures to that.”

In contrast to the instructors who mentioned using student profiles more at the beginning of the course, another instructor mentioned that they did use profiles, but insisted that their students’ customizations had no effect on their perceptions of students or their work:

“I don’t think it affected my views of their future work, though that’s a hard thing to quantify. When I have classes of 24 students, I do think the introductions help me more quickly learn students’ names, but I don’t think I usually remember things about them that they wrote in their introductions even a couple weeks after having read them. They’d probably have to be really unique for that to happen.”

Other instructors mentioned that they didn’t use the profile pictures, negating the Panopticon-esque effect of instructors using the grading interface: “The profile picture is just an icon on the left side of the screen, and I’m not usually even focused on it (when I’m importing grades, etc.). It’s kinda fru-fru to the task at hand.” In their interview, one instructor mentioned minimizing students’ profile picture thumbnails on the grading interface to free more space on the screen for information like the students’ submission times and grading information.

With all of the positive and negative attitudes toward student customization and thoughts on how student customization affects instructors’ perceptions of students’ work, the question remains: how do instructors use students’ customized profiles? The most utilitarian reason is for

instructors to find students' contact information. Instructors don't want to spend much time on students' profiles. One instructor wrote, "I've briefly perused [students' profiles], but it isn't something I spend a great amount of time on. It's more skimming than deep reading." Even though instructors don't spend much time on student profiles, many instructors still "often look just out of curiosity about what [students] write." Another instructor reinforced this, saying, "Most students don't create the profile, so I'm always interested in the students who do. It sends a signal to me that they want me (and their peers) to get to know them." Even if students spend time customizing their CMS profiles and instructors spend time reading customized profiles, instructors still get to know students better face-to-face rather than through the profiles. In this way, even though profiles exist in both CMS and social media, these profiles function differently, mimicking the real-life contexts in which these students and instructors exist (Raad, Chbeir, & Dipanda., 2013).

Social Media versus Course Management Systems

Not only do many instructors view student customization negatively, some instructors also view any features of CMS that resemble traits of social media adversely. A few instructors who view CMS positively do feel that teaching students skills that transfer to social media is part of their job as instructors; however, the majority of instructors want nothing to do with CMS customization or student profiles.

The same but different

Much of the literature that covers CMS and their Millennial users touches on Social Media as well, including the idea of using a social media site as a CMS (Aubry, 2013; Souleles, 2012). Following this trend, four instructors explicitly connected student CMS profile

customization to students' use of social media sites. About their students who customized their CMS profiles, one instructor wrote, "I feel they are probably very active on social media." This connection between social media profiles and CMS profiles deserves a greater focus in the literature as CMS profiles give students practice representing themselves as professionals.

While many instructors felt that student customization was indeed useful, curiosity-invoking, or at the very least non-harmful, instructors only viewed student profile customization positively as long as the students represented themselves in professional, appropriate ways. One instructor wrote:

"I don't actually like [student profile customization], because it seems to blur the professional boundaries of the classroom. I feel like they might represent themselves in a way more in tune with their other social media profiles than with the way they would present themselves in the classroom."

If this resistance of student profile customization is deeply connected to students not

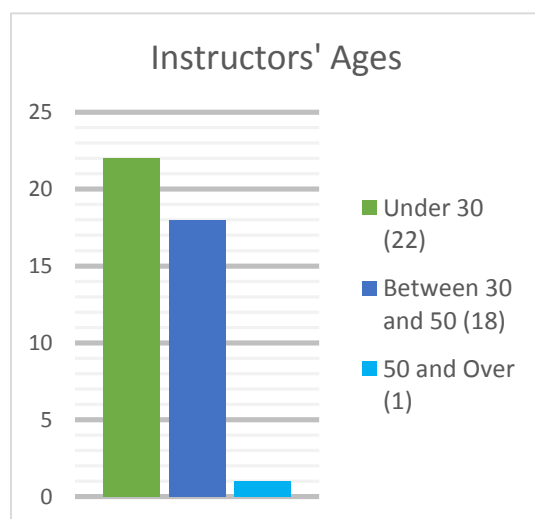


Figure 10. Even though most instructors surveyed criticized social media, all but one of these instructors were under 50 years of age. The majority of instructors surveyed were under 30 years of age.

representing themselves appropriately, how can instructors help these students to learn how to present themselves to academic and/or professional audiences? Teaching students to represent themselves through online presences like CMS profiles or an introductory page on ISUComm Sites could mitigate most of the issue.

In addition to instructors responding negatively to CMS or writing about relegating their CMS to a mere online syllabus, instructors also

consistently criticized social media sites in their responses to the survey. This was surprising, given the demographics of the instructors surveyed. Of the 41 respondents, 22 were under 30 years of age, 18 were between 30 and 50 years of age, and only one instructor was over 50 years of age (refer to Figure 10). Of those same 41 instructors, the overwhelming majority (39 of the 41) had social media accounts themselves (see Figure 11). Only two instructors did not have a personal social media account of any kind.

Essentially, the tension between instructors having personal social media accounts while belittling their students for treating CMS profiles like social media appears an interesting one. To this end, one instructor wrote about CMS profiles and their similarity to social media sites:

“I can honestly only remember having seen a handful of student profile pictures. It is nice to have a face to put with the student name; however, I really don't feel that this is essential. If anything, it mimics social media sites.”

Even though this instructor spoke positively of customized student profiles as an aid to memory, the instructor still wrote negatively about the way in which CMS and social media profiles overlap. While students generally desire to have boundaries between their personal and professional lives (Skeels and Grudin, 2009), some students have no sense of these boundaries, posting images that do not lead instructors to a positive “impression formation” (Van Der Heide et al., 2012, p. 99). Another instructor

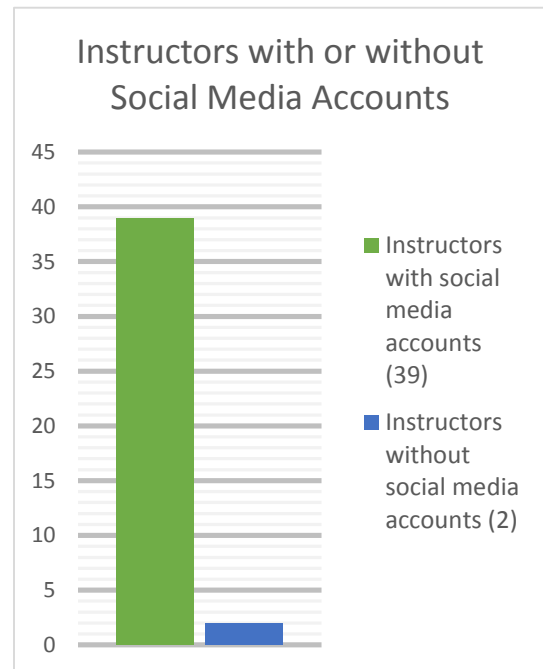


Figure 11. 95% of instructors surveyed had personal social media accounts, creating an interesting tension between instructors' personal habits and their criticism of social media-like features in CMS.

wrote about students not understanding boundaries between their personal and professional lives, evidenced by the pictures that students posted to their CMS profiles:

“Their pictures sometimes have a brief negative impression because I consider that some pictures students upload are more appropriate for FaceBook (sic) than for a scholarly environment which I am helping them become part of.”

Four instructors had (justified) concerns about professionalism in student profile customization, complaining that students used the profile tool like social media. All complaints or negative views of student customization mentioned students’ image choices; no instructors who responded to this survey mentioned students’ use of text in their CMS profile customizations as a negative factor. While errors like typos and gaffes like oversharing could damage instructors’ perceptions of students, none of the instructors here mentioned textual customization in CMS profiles as a negative factor when viewing customized CMS profiles or evaluating student work.

Issues of student professionalism

Instructors mentioned several problems with student customization. Thirteen of the 30 instructors who replied to the survey question asking them to describe their impressions of students after seeing their profiles answered either “no change” or “not applicable” or that they did not care about student profile customization. In contrast, only one instructor expressed a negative opinion about profile customization. This instructor worried that student customization would lead students to treat their profile in a similar way as their social media profile:

“I don't actually like [student customization], because it seems to blur the professional boundaries of the classroom. I feel like [students] might represent themselves in a way

more in tune with their other social media profiles than with the way they would present themselves in the classroom.”

Where are the boundaries of the classroom? Many of these instructors who responded to the surveys seem to think that teaching students anything related to social media is outside the bounds of both physical and online classrooms. One instructor exemplified this, writing that while they liked seeing students’ pictures and that these pictures helped their memory of students, that customization was still not an essential part of their teaching because, “If anything, [customization] mimics social media sites.”

Conversely, many instructors mentioned that their “[impressions] stayed mostly the same. Most of what [students] put up was information that had also come out during classes.” Reinforcing this idea that profiles mostly back up students’ in-person self-representations, a different instructor wrote, “My impression doesn't change since we do everything face to face. Maybe if I was teaching online only it would be more important to have students create profiles.” Still, instructors feel that profiles are a distraction from “the issue at hand.” Eight instructors indicated that while they do “encourage [students to customize],” they will “not require it because it takes some policing.” Eleven instructors indicated that they might ask students to customize in future semesters.

According to the instructors surveyed, students customizing their CMS profiles with an unprofessional image was the biggest problem instructors had with student customization other than apathy towards customization or lack of time to read them. When asked about to describe their impressions of those particular students after seeing their profile pictures, six instructors mentioned students’ lack of professionalism and image choice. To this end, one instructor wrote that while they say their students’ profile picture thumbnails, they “didn't click on them, but from

what I've seen they're usually professional photos. They're usually guys.” In contrast, another instructor wrote, “I don't analyze their pictures. Often it's puppies or kitties, and it's more often the girls than the boys that have a profile picture.” These two responses reflect a slight gender bias that could produce fascinating results about impression formation in academic environments.

Several instructors actually had positive or neutral things to say about their impressions of students after viewing students' academic profiles, writing, “It's interesting to see what images they chose to represent themselves, but I don't think too much about it.” This gets back to the idea that instructors don't spend much time on students' user profiles, favoring “skimming” over “deep reading” when viewing customized CMS profiles. Describing their impressions of student customization, another instructor wrote, “It depends on the student- some use the opportunity to post a picture of themselves, but others will post an avatar or a picture of something they are a fan of.” CMS profile customizations reflect the students themselves, especially when students select images outside of what (in academic contexts) is considered “professional” or “normal.” One instructor wrote about an experience they had with a student's CMS profile picture:

“Although I feel that some profile pictures do not present a professional ethos, I hope I am professional enough to overlook that impression in my attitudes and grading and not let the pictures have a lasting effect. The student who placed her baby's photo confused me at first until I realized it was her baby. Then I was amused whenever I saw it, but it still did not present a professional ethos.”

Another instructor mentioned the “brief negative impression” their students' profile pictures gave him or her, writing, “I consider that some pictures students upload are more appropriate for FaceBook (sic) than for a scholarly environment which I am helping them

become part of.” The issue of image choice is a large one in student profile customization. Some instructors were willing to help their students learn to use profile customization in a positive way, writing, “I might [ask future students to customize their CMS profiles] because it can be good practice for them to create a more professional presence online.” If students are blurring the lines between their personal and professional lives through profile customization, or, on the flip side, staunchly refusing to customize their CMS profiles “because that’s weird,” instructors have the responsibility to encourage students to customize in a comfortable, professional way.

Student transfer in online impression formation

Still, some instructors resist teaching their students about profile customization or creating an online presence. Reasons instructors cited included lack of time, lack of project importance compared to other things they needed to teach, and lack of interest in students’ customizations because customization “mimics social media.” One instructor summed up this resistant attitude:

“I think [students] spend enough time filling themselves with images of themselves as it is. I want to promote empathy in my students, not narcissism. I understand that they need to learn how to present themselves in a professional manner to others, but there has to be a more productive/philosophically sound way of teaching them this skill/there should be some underlying philosophy that accompanies a homework activity of this nature.”

When instructors answered the question on why they would or would not ask students to customize their CMS profiles in future semesters, the responses were ambivalent. Many instructors feel that they “should” ask students to customize or that it could “work.” The outliers to this group were instructors who asked their students to create ISComm Sites for e-portfolios where students’ work was housed all semester. Having a more concrete audience for student

customization (like ISUComm sites does) adds another layer of purpose and context to a customization assignment to teach students how to present themselves electronically to an audience.

What kinds of transformative learning could occur if instructors helped students master the skills and literacies that students often use on social media, instead of leaving social media outside the boundaries of the classroom? While Millennial students certainly engage with social media, these students don't always think critically of these technologies or transfer skills from CMS to social media (Dahlstrom, Brooks, and Bichsel, 2014). The online composition classroom has the potential to positively affect students' ideas of audience analysis and professional use of online tools to give students a better understanding of how profiles have a "real-world application."

Limitations of the Study

As a qualitative study, this work contains several limitations that affect this study's reliability. The snowball method of participant recruitment meant that the instructors surveyed were in Rhetoric and Professional Communication programs at Iowa State University and that most had only taught English 150 or 250 at Iowa State University for 3-6 semesters. Only 3 of the 41 instructors surveyed had taught online when this data was collected; data about using CMS profiles in an online class may not reflect the actual reality of online teaching and learning. While the results here reflect the experiences of these instructors, they do not necessarily represent all who have taught ISUComm Foundation Courses. Lecturers, more experienced teaching assistants, and tenured faculty did not have a high response rate for this study.

This study asked instructors about remembering students who customized their CMS profiles and asked instructors to judge those students' engagement with the course. What

instructors perceived here may not have actually been the case as this study did not collect data about student performance or instructor memory. As most ISUComm Foundation Courses instructors used Moodle, this study focused on Moodle and did not explore a wider range of CMS.

CONCLUSION

After compiling these results, I propose several recommendations about using CMS and teaching electronic communication, including online profile management. Encouraging a basic set of expectations for CMS use in the classroom could help students and instructors to feel more comfortable with CMS use and customization. CMS and Eportfolios could also be used for teaching students how to professionally customize a profile. More research is needed in several areas of CMS and profile customization. As these results show, if instructors customize their profiles, this then encourages students' comfort and encourages both instructors and students to invest personally in the course.

Recommendations

While each instructor uses their CMS according to their own individual teaching style, there are currently no set expectations for instructors to use CMS in their classrooms. This lack of expectations contrasts with the systematic curriculum and assessment of instructors teaching English 150 and 250 at Iowa State University. Expecting instructors to use their CMS as more than just an online syllabus could help both students and instructors to engage with CMS in a more satisfying way, especially if students and instructors customize their CMS profiles, as instructors saw students who customized their CMS profiles as more engaged in the class.

Teaching students professional profile management through practice with a CMS such as Moodle or ISUComm sites could be a way to reinforce the concept of ethos in the first-year composition classroom. This engagement with student profiles also helps students to analyze their audience and to learn where the boundaries are between their personal and professional lives before they enter the workforce. Essentially, electronic portfolios can provide a space and a tool for practicing online profile management in a safe environment.

One concrete recommendation this study puts forth is to automatically upload students' AccessPlus photographs when they sign up for Moodle. As Moodle is a secure, password-protected site, automatically loading students' AccessPlus pictures as students' profile pictures would be an easy way to add more faces to the Moodle site. Students can then be encouraged to replace their AccessPlus picture with a more current or representative image.

A major call for research is to examine how instructors who teach online courses use CMS. While 3 instructors who were surveyed had taught online courses within the past year, not enough data about how instructors of online courses use online students' customized profiles was gathered.

Other calls for research include correlating engagement with CMS and engagement in the course, further examining what actually makes a student's profile "professional." More scholarship on how instructors at other institutions use CMS and CMS profiles would also add to this field of knowledge. It would also be fascinating to examine if a correlation exists between students' technological skills and their proficiencies in electronic communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, not much research exists in CMS or profile customization. As instructors' discomfort with social media in the classroom (or any CMS feature that resembles social media), it can be inferred that students use some of the same skills for profile customization that they do for social media; however, students use these skills for a different purpose as CMS act as working spaces instead of social spaces. To this end, "impression formation" matters (Van Der Heide et al., 2012, p. 109) for both students and instructors. Instructors should show themselves as professional and approachable, while students should show themselves as professional and engaged in the course. To practice digital literacies, students do need practice presenting

themselves online in these digital classrooms. While these public profiles may still face technological hurdles and resistance from instructors, if those of us in English don't teach students to manage their profiles, who will?

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below are the survey and interview questions used for this study.

Survey

This study will include a 20-minute survey. The survey will begin with demographic questions (age, how many semesters as an instructor at Iowa State, etc.). The second half of the survey will contain these questions:

- Which course management system (CMS), if any, do you use?
- How do you use your CMS in the classroom? Is it just for posting homework? Or do your students access and turn in homework via the CMS? Do students turn in assignments via your CMS?
- Do you view and/or grade student work (quizzes, journals, assignments, etc.) through the CMS interface? Why/why not? What are your thoughts on this?
- Have you customized your own CMS profile with a picture or text? Why/why not?
- Have any of your students customized their CMS profiles? With text? With an image?
 - If yes, what was your impression of your student(s) after seeing their profile picture? Did this profile picture help you remember your student(s)?
- Have you looked at your students' profiles? If so, when in the semester? Did seeing their profiles affect your memory of those students?
- Would you like more of your students to customize their CMS profiles? Why/why not?

Interview

The follow-up interview will last for 1 hour. It will include these questions:

- How do you use your course management system in your teaching? What features do you use most often?
- Have you asked students to customize their profiles? Why/why not?
- Would you prefer that your students customize their profiles or not customize their profiles with text and/or images?
- Has any material in your classes covered online identity? Has any material in your classes talked about social media profiles?
- Have any of your students customized their CMS profiles? What did you notice about this?
- Does student profile customization suggest to you that the student is more engaged in the class? Is this in fact the case?
- Does it seem like students who customize their course management profiles are more adept with technology? And is this in fact the case?
- Do students who customize their profiles seem more able to make connections between class work and out-of-class work in/his portfolio (paper-based or electronic)?